

Tibetan Tantric Psychophysics



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2020

Note: This document comprises Chapter 5 of a book by Shelli Joye that is scheduled to be published by Inner Traditions in late 2021 as *Tantric Psychophysics: A Guidebook for Psychonauts*. Her latest book, *The Electromagnetic Brain: EM Field Theories on the Nature of Consciousness*, will be released to bookstores and Amazon.com on November 17, 2020.

Tibetan Tantric Psychophysics

Given its vast empty regions of wind-swept valleys and snow-covered peaks, the isolation afforded Tibet has long been fertile ground for the growth of deep contemplative practice. Living on windswept plateaus with sudden thunderstorms and driving hail, the inhabitants of Tibet could easily view nature as manifesting living demons of tumultuous energy.

In Tibetan history, the Bön religion with its animal sacrifice and multitudinous nature spirits dates as far back as 3800 years when it is thought to have been brought into the region from ancient Persia. A recent Chinese census suggests that approximately ten percent of Tibetans continue to practice the Bön religion and there are almost 300 Bön monasteries that continue to be active, according to Chinese reports. Ordinary Tibetans clearly differentiate between Böns and Buddhists, with members of Tibetan Buddhist sects (Nyingma, Sakya, Kagyu and Gelug) being often referred to as *nangpa*, (“insiders”), while practitioners of the Bön religion are often referred to as *chipa* (“outsiders”).

Buddhism itself was introduced into Tibet fourteen hundred years ago from northern India in its *Mahāyāna*¹ form, a movement that had become noted for its ability to readily adapt to indigenous cultures. This effort to introject the element of nonexclusiveness into the more rigid (“purer”) *Theravāda* Buddhism (traditionally

¹ *Mahāyāna* Buddhism developed in India around 1st century BCE onwards. *Mahāyāna* Buddhism developed in India from the 1st century BCE onwards. *Vajrayāna* is thought to be a “subset” of *Mahāyāna* and makes use of numerous Tantric methods that are considered to be faster and more powerful than the mindfulness contemplative techniques taught in the earlier *Theravāda* Buddhist schools of Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu (South India).

taught in southern India) is definitely in line with the Tantric characteristics of openness to women, lower castes, and indigenous cults. Certainly in Tibet, the success of the early Buddhist “missionaries” (i.e. Nāropā, Padmasambhava, etc.), appears due in large part to the eagerness of the previously autonomous Bön culture to learn and adopt the myriad highly developed and refined Tantric practices at which these early Indian Buddhist teachers were also known to be great adepts.

The Buddhist Tantras came into existence, according to the Tibetan evidence, after the time of Dharmakīrti (c. 600-660 CE). Their origin as a distinct class of literature and a mode of sadhana may be placed in the seventh century, and they underwent great development during the three succeeding centuries.ⁱ

Buddhism in Tibet quickly evolved into the form now known as Vajrayāna, a term that is often used loosely to indicate Tibetan Buddhism as a whole. Some scholars hold that Tantric Buddhism is an offshoot of Tantric Hinduism, but some authorities have demonstrated that several of the Buddhist Tantras were composed as early as the third century CE and that it is likely that the earliest Tantric Buddhism antedates Tantric Hinduism (though not Hinduism itself).

This chapter will not go deeply into the vast range of Tantric techniques developed by Tibetan psychonauts, but will instead focus upon a clear articulation of a major map of conscious states pioneered by Tibetans of the various states that may eventually experienced beyond that of the initial mastery of Patañjali’s *asamprajñāta samādhi* (also known as “consciousness without an object”).

Common to both Patañjali’s Yoga and Tibetan *Vajrayāna* is the observation that the path to enlightenment consists of three fundamental training categories:

- Ethical training
- *Samādhi* (meditative absorption or trance)
- *Prajñā* (effulgent wisdom-knowledge of reality)

Ethical training, covered extensively in the second chapter of Patañjali's *Yoga Sutras* (e.g., actions to avoid such as lying or killing, and practices to cultivate such as nonviolence, truthfulness, kindness, generosity, etc.) is required in every school of Buddhism and Hinduism (and in every religious tradition) in order to facilitate the ability of the human brain-mind to easily reach the state of calm detachment that is a precursor to the attainment of *samādhi*. The practice and mastery of the various "virtues" as described in the second chapter of the *Yoga Sutras* leaves the psychonaut untroubled by conscious or subconscious conflicts that would otherwise be sure to arise during attempts to reach and to maintain the state of *samādhi*, due to distraction caused by various emotional afflictions (guilt, fear, anger, jealousy, hatred, impatience, etc.).

Samādhi itself, and in particular *asamprajñāta samādhi* is the primary tool that has been found necessary, both in Tibet as well as India, for entering the "higher worlds" of contemplative exploration, and is the eighth and final "limb" in Patañjali's *aṣṭāṅga yoga*² set forth in great detail within the *Yoga Sutras*.

However the teachings of the 19th century psychonaut Düdjom Lingpa (1835-1907) goes far beyond Patañjali's *Yoga Sutras* to reveal a landscape that opens up to those

² The eight limbs according to Patañjali are *yama* (abstinences), *niyama* (observances), *asana* (yoga postures), *pranayama* (breathing meditations), *pratyahara* (withdrawal of the external senses), *dharana* (concentration, introspective focus), *dhyana* (uninterrupted contemplation) and *samadhi* (trance absorption).

psychonauts who are able to use *samādhi* to reach unimaginable states and stages of awareness lying far beyond everyday normal human brain-mind consciousness.

But we begin first with a brief history of the Vajrayāna schools in Tibet. Over the centuries, four distinct orders or schools of Buddhism (**Error! Reference source not found.**) have emerged in Tibet, somewhat distinguishable by the color of ceremonial hats, red or yellow. Some Tibetans consider only the Nyingma sect to be authentic “Red Hats.”

Name	Order	Founders/ Teachers	Approximate Date Founded	Nickname and Attributes
Nyingma 2 nd largest	“Red Hats”	• Padma Sambhava	8 th century CE	“Ancient ones” - Oldest; focus on mantra and
Kagyu 3 rd in size	“Red Hats”	• Milarepa • Naropa • Marpa	11 th century CE	“Ear Whispered” - Strict practice; similar to Zen
Sakya Smallest	“Red Hats”	• Atisa	10 th century CE	“Pale earth” - focus on the Path and its fruit
Gelug Largest	“Yellow Hats”	• Tsong Kapa (the Dalai Lama)	15 th century CE	Newest sect - Monastic focus on discipline and scholastic learning

Fig. 5.1. Schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

Tantric Buddhism primarily emphasizes *method* as opposed to piety or scholarship, and the very root of the word, *tantra*, suggesting as it does “to weave,” implies an activity of integrating multiple threads of practical activity from which a whole pattern will eventually emerge into the awareness of the contemplative practitioner. To aid in this endeavor, Tibetan’s have developed an entire “contemplative technology” to assist

aspirants in their development of new powers of supersensible perception, and one might even liken their approach to that of engineers developing practical applications of the principles a “spiritual science.”

Vajrayāna, often called the “Thunderbolt Vehicle,” “Diamond Vehicle,” or “Indestructible Vehicle,” refers to the vajra (fig 1-1), a ritual implement widely used along with the ritual bell in Tibetan Tantric meditations and ceremonies. The vajra as a symbolic instrument emerged in India during Vedic times and was said to be the weapon used by the king of the gods to dispell ignorance and fear. It was thought to be adamantine hard, stronger than a diamond, and able to generate immense lightening bolts and thunder, revealing the absolute truth of reality in a flash of insight.



Fig. 1-1 Tibetan ritual bell and vajra.ⁱⁱ

The ritual *vajra* instrument is typically two or three inches long and cast in bronze, silver, or gold and originally taken to be the weapon (and symbol) of the Vedic deity Indra, chief of the gods. The shape of the *vajra* symbolizes the fusion of duality in the balance of the nondual center. The *vajra* is often held in the right hand of the contemplative at the beginning of a meditation session, during which a mantra is recited, usually the traditional *Om mani padme hum*. The *vajra* represents the male energy of the universe that bursts into existence (space-time) from within the transcendent Void (implicate order).

The ritual bell is held in the left hand of the contemplative and is rung at the beginning and end of a meditation period. It symbolizes the female energy that projects and sustains the universe through pure vibration of sound waves and energy frequencies.

Three Stages of Vajrayāna Practice

Contemplative practices in Vajrayāna are used as the means to attain three different skills that are generally thought to be acquired sequentially within the lifetime of the contemplative.

- For stilling the active cognitive ego-mind with its monkey-like leaping of thoughts.
- For the development and activation of latent powers of consciousness called *siddhis* in Sanskrit (e.g. supersensory perception, precognition, telepathy, knowledge of higher worlds, etc.).
- For attaining the goal of complete suspension of the normal cognitive activity of the ego-mind (thinking, remembering, conceptualizing) which then triggers a radical shift into non-dual awareness, perceptual integration with the source of consciousness and an accompanying sensation of being flooded by an infinity of dazzling lights of pure wisdom understanding.

Düdjom Lingpa

One of the greatest Tantric meditation masters in all of Tibet was the 19th century Nyingma meditation master Düdjom Lingpa, who essentially was “self-taught” by conscious entities that appeared to him throughout his lifetime, beginning at three years old. He produced five major written works in conjunction with his “inner guides” that elaborate with great clarity different aspects of contemplative practice and describing experiences that offer a clear map of the various states and stages of consciousness that will

be experienced by the practitioner as consciousness grows in power and capability during the navigation of supersensible domains of the universe.

During his lifetime, Düdjom Lingpa was able to locate, with the help of visions opened to him by his invisible mentors, innumerable caches of spiritual implements left by earlier generations of enlightened contemplatives. Accordingly he is regarded by Tibetans as a *tertön*, or “treasure revealer,” both in the sense of revealing actual treasure objects, but perhaps more importantly as the revealer of treasures of teaching-wisdom for aiding other explorers on the path of self-knowledge and the expansion of consciousness.

Düdjom Lingpa’s *Vajra Essence* is a teaching text that was purported to have been revealed to him when he was twenty-seven in what has been called a *pure vision*.ⁱⁱⁱ clear presentation of what is known as the Dzogchen³ path that has developed in Tibetan Vajrayāna since the 10th century CE. Yet his teachings were initially met with great skepticism by many of his contemporaries, due to the fact that, despite not studying under any established Buddhist teachers of his time, he claimed to have received teachings on meditation and spiritual practice directly from non-physical sources of wisdom knowledge. Düdjom claimed to have received guidance over many years from at least fourteen transcendent sources who transmitted to him knowledge to direct his conscious exploration toward the ultimate goal, the experience of the underlying absolute reality of the cosmos, which we have compared to modern physics (elsewhere in this book) as David Bohm’s “implicate order.” When many of his direct students were seen to clearly

³ Dzogchen (known as “The Great Perfection” or “utmost yoga”) arose in the 10th century in Tibet as a Tantric practice in the Nyingma tradition. This teaching tradition has continued to evolve as a guide to developing knowledge (*rigpa*) of the higher worlds and especially the direct, nondual experience of reaching the underlying omnipresent ground of absolute Being (Jung’s “Self,” Brahma, God, the Void).

exhibit signs of spiritual advancement, Düdjom 's status rose considerably. Düdjom Lingpa said:

Hold this to be the most excellent key point--to practice with intense and unflagging exertion until you attain supreme timeless awareness (*jñāna*), which is total omniscience.

Düdjom Lingpa explains in great detail the various states and stages of Dzogchen contemplative practice known as the “Great Perfection.” This acts as a map for those working to expand and to explore consciousness beyond the states of *samādhi* in far greater detail than is elaborated even in Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*. the several major stages of psychonautic experience leading beyond (above) The Great Perfection also maps with great clarity major stages of contemplative exploration beyond the entry state of samadhi. Of course this might be expected due to the innumerable generations of contributors to this Tantric exploration via Dzogchen. Patañjali compiled the *Yoga Sutras* five hundred years before Dzogchen emerged as a teaching path in Tibet, and then jumping a thousand years more into Düdjom Lingpa’s century, it is understandable that “Great Perfection” is more advanced than the *Yoga Sutras* through the contribution of innumerable contemplative experiences would have enhanced knowledge of such higher states and stages. Fig. 1-3 shows the contributions from both Patanjali and Düdjom Lingpa revealing five major stages of consciousness that are open to a psychonaut who has mastered the powerful contemplative tool that is *samādhi*.

The Ascent from Patanjali's *Samādhi* to Dudjom Lingpa's “Joining”

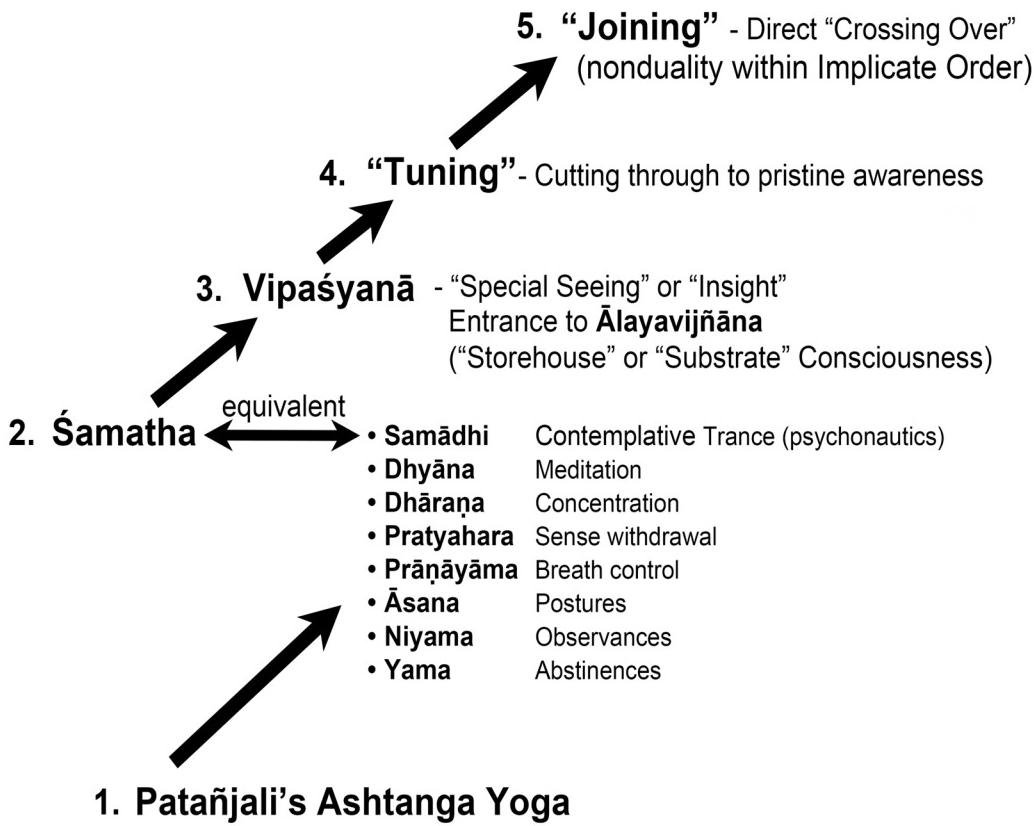


Fig. 1-3 From Patanjali Samadhi to Dudjom Lingpa's Joining.

From Samadhi to “Joining”

Stage 1: Patañjali's *Ashtanga Yoga*

Starting at the bottom in **Error! Reference source not found.** is Patañjali's *ashtanga yoga* (“eightfold path”) which has been discussed in greater detail in the previous chapter (see **Error! Reference source not found.** on page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**). *Ashtanga yoga* encompasses eight subject areas (listed in the figure) that Patañjali tells us must be mastered in order to attain the ability to enter

the state of *samādhi*. Halfway up the figure can be seen a horizontal arrow to indicate the general equivalency of the *śamatha* state itself and Patañjali's *samādhi*. It might be said that the eight steps elaborated by Patañjali are efforts that are undertaken in space-time in order to reach the state of *samādhi* which then becomes a portal for transcending space-time, i.e., leaving the dimensions of "consciousness in space-time" and entering the transcendental dimensions which exist beyond space-time.⁴ So both *samādhi* and *śamatha* can be seen as transitional states of consciousness whereby individual awareness stands at the threshold of a vast ocean of consciousness that is beyond space and time.

The word *śamatha* has been translated alternately as "shining," "calm abiding," "mind calmness," or "meditative quiescence" and can be thought of as the entranceway or a portal into an ocean of consciousness that is then open for navigation by psychonauts.

Stage 2: Śamatha

In the *Vajra Essence* three sequential stages of contemplative effort or *śamatha* practice are enumerated:

1. Mindfulness of breathing
2. Taking the impure mind as the path
3. Awareness of awareness

It is assumed that the contemplative has mastered all of the preliminary seven steps of the first stage of *ashtanga yoga* and has gained experience and partial mastery of *dhyāna* (known as Zen in Japanese traditions). In *śamatha* it is the *dhyāna* state that is

⁴ Modern physics, in particular "M-theory" recognizes 11 distinct dimensions of which 4 are space (3 dimensions) and time (1 dimension).

used to focus upon the process breathing during the transition period as all other activities of the external sensory systems, thoughts, and memories are being attenuated as the brain-mind moves toward deeper levels of awareness.

The second stage of *śamatha* is “taking the impure mind as the path.” In this practice, one uses the activities of the mind itself to “follow” as “the path.” The effort here is the practice of observing the activities of the mind-brain and in so doing to develop the skill to distinguish between movements of the mind and the stillness of pure awareness. Dūdjom Lingpa wrote that during this practice meditators “observe their thoughts ‘over there’ like an old herdsman on a wide-open plain watching his calves and sheep from afar.”^{iv}

One learns to separate the observer from the observed, whereas in the everyday normal state of consciousness one distinguishes no separation, i.e., the observer identifies with the observed. For example one might say “I am my anger,” or “I am my thoughts.” During this second stage of *śamatha* practice there is no overt suppression of mental activity (memory, thought, sensations) however the observer learns to gently let go of such activity as it arises and instead to continue to focus on quiescence, the stillness of awareness. This is the famous practice of “mindfulness,” and here Dūdjom Lingpa points out that the goal is to arrive at an awareness of the “substrate consciousness,” the *alayavijnana*, which can only be experienced once awareness has been as fully detached as possible from the normal cognitive activities of the brain-mind. This state has often been called simply “trance” in shamanic traditions.

The third stage of *śamatha* has been characterized as “awareness of awareness.” The observing consciousness is no longer “looking out” through the external senses, nor hopping around from thought to thought or memory to memory. Instead the

contemplative has reached a state of being aware of pure “awareness” itself, without any other object of awareness. While Teilhard de Chardin might characterize it with the term “co-reflexion,” it can be seen as equivalent to Patanjali’s state of *asamprajñāta samādhi*, “consciousness without an object.”

The Tibetan approach to contemplative practice distinguishes the following nine stages of meditation that act as guides or milestones that a student can use to evaluate their progress in these observed stages that lead up to the culminating in the experience of pure *śamatha*. The distinction among these various stages reminds us that acquisition of the skill that is *śamatha* is generally one that is not mastered overnight, but that in practice, success requires a consistent regular investment of time and effort.

- **Placement of the mind** Ability to focus upon object of meditation.
- **Continuous placement** Longer periods of continuous focus.
- **Repeated placement** Skill in returning to focus after interruptions.
- **Close placement** Continuous focus on object during session.
- **Taming** Attainment of periods of deep tranquility.
- **Pacifying** Ability to attenuate interruptive distractions.
- **Fully pacifying** Complete elimination of distraction.
- **Single-pointing** Single-pointed focus with no fatigue.
- **Balanced placement** Continuity of focus throughout entire period.
- **Śamatha** Deep continuous contemplative focus.

The experience of consciousness in the state of *śamatha* is entrance to the *dharmakaya*, “the ultimate dimensions of consciousness which is said to be primordially pure, beyond time and space, and transcends all conceptual constructs.”^v It is during

śamatha that consciousness flows through the body unobstructed to irradiate the systems of the physical body while healing and upgrading various mind-brain centers. This flowing communication with the deepest levels of consciousness also occurs during the healing process, particularly when an individual is at rest or asleep. However rather than simply trying to heal some injury to the body, the contemplative is seeking to develop completely new functional abilities for conscious awareness by upgrading and then activating the various “organs of perception” (i.e. the *chakras*). This is greatly facilitated by the neuroplasticity of the nervous system, the ability to reprogram neuronal systems to provide new functionality. As Bruce Alan Wallace says:

Even when you emerge from meditation, this body-mind upgrade is yours to employ in your dealings with the world. . . . Here we’re allowing the entire system of the subtle body-and-mind to balance and heal itself.^{vi}

While tuning up the entire physiological system and healing injuries is definitely facilitated by the practice of *śamatha*, the primary motivation of the contemplative in developing *śamatha* is to attain direct entry into the experience of *vipaśyanā*. Upon entry into *vipaśyanā*, one is able to experience directly the *ālayavijñāna*, translated variously as “source consciousness,” “base consciousness,” “storehouse consciousness,” or “causal consciousness.” This is the level of normally subliminal mental consciousness that occurs uninterruptedly throughout one’s life and that continues from life to life should the individual *puruṣa* reincarnate.

The *ālayavijñāna* is said to be the base-level or ground of consciousness for all human experiences. It acts as a base container for all ordinary human sensory and cognitive experiences in space and time. Within the *ālayavijñāna* are stored what are called seed patterns or *bijas*, tendencies that have been etched into this level of

consciousness by prior experiences, somewhat as water flowing over a dry land etches a distinctively unique fractal pattern in the soil. All traces of past actions may be found here within the *ālayavijñāna* as cognitive “seeds” that are ready to ripen into future experience should triggers be encountered and not immediately defused through the practice of detachment.

This is also the stage within which it is possible to further what is called “generation and completion” of various subsystems of psychical communication or centers of transception known as the *chakra* centers. During *vipaśyanā* it is possible to focus upon individual *chakra* regions within the body, establishing linkages or bridges between multiple dimensions that nourish and tune the centers for enhanced communication with the wider cosmic regions of consciousness. Eventually the individual *chakras* “open” (the analogy is the opening of a lotus blossom) and begin to operate at heightened levels of supersensory awareness.

With the aid of various *chakras* of supersensory perception, the psychonaut’s consciousness is able to tune itself into new frequency bands of awareness. Eventually there is a direct “crossing over” from space-time to the transcendent as the psychonaut’s center of consciousness “joins” with the transcendental Self, or *dharma-kāya*.

The Union of *Śamatha* and *Vipaśyanā*

In the introduction to his translation of Dudjom Lingpa’s *The Heart of Great Perfection*, B. Alan Wallace explains the importance of the unified practice of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*:

One major outcome of *śamatha* is experiential access to the substrate consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), characterized by bliss, luminosity, and

nonconceptuality. Through the achievement of *śamatha*, the body-mind is made supple and marvelously serviceable, preparing one to utilize the distilled clarity and stability of the mind to cultivate contemplative insight, which lies at the heart of the higher training in wisdom. With the union of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*, one is well prepared to achieve a radical, irreversible healing and awakening of the mind through gaining direct insight into the ultimate nature of reality... The unified practice of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* as taught in our texts is an essential aspect of meditation in all Buddhist traditions.^{vii}

Having established the primary goals as taught in Tibetan Vajrayāna, we turn now to several primary psychonautic techniques of contemplative practice that have been found to be highly effective as developed over the centuries in Tibet.

Psychonautic Techniques of Tibetan Vajrayana

The core objective of this chapter is to develop not only a map of higher stages of consciousness but also the knowledge of practical efforts developed over the centuries in Tibet to cultivate psychoenergetic tools that have been found especially useful for the acquisition and exploration of “higher states” of consciousness. The Tibetan Vajrayana is a thoroughly Buddhist-based teaching and thus presents its knowledge in the rich frameworks both of Buddhism and the earlier Bön culture that developed among the people of the Tibetan plateau. While there are innumerable psychophysical techniques found in Tibetan traditions, we will focus here on the following five:

- *visualization*
- *chakras*
- *mantra*

- *nada yoga*
- and *yidam development*

Tibetan Visualization Yoga

One of the characteristics of the Tibetan Vajrayāna is its extensive use of techniques of *visualization*, a practice that is widespread among all of the Tibetan sects and perhaps more pervasively explored here than among Indian Tantric traditions. Visualization is typically performed in private within a monastic meditation cell, a shrineroom of a monastery, or an upper room in a private house. The purpose of the yoga of visualization is to use a known sensory system of the mind-brain to achieve higher states of consciousness. The contemplative visually focuses on the immediacy of a static image, striving to bring the entire image into maximum clarity and stability without distraction. While conscious energy is being focused and channeled on the object being visualized, other systems of the cognitive mind quiet down, attenuate, and fall into the state of quiescence that is requisite for breakthrough into higher channels of communicative awareness. At some point the mind-brain's quiescence allows the observer "to become the observed," and a shift occurs at which moment the contemplative identifies with the image under focus. Beginning contemplatives are given simple images to visualize such as the single *bija* (seed) syllable, the Tibetan character equivalent of the Om symbol in India (fig. 1-4).



Fig. 1-4 Tibetan Aum bija symbol

Once mastered, the student must commit to memory a visualization of the *mantra* that is ubiquitous in Tibet, “Om Mani Padme Hum” (fig. 1-7 discussed later in this chapter), after which the student proceeds to visually memorize line drawings and finally commit to memory the visualization of complex and colorful *thangka* paintings.

The cognitive “location” of the visualized image is also of importance. Most frequently the visualization for beginners is that of a small two-dimensional symbol in an interior space to the front of the visualizer. However more advanced practices involve visualizing three-dimensional images sitting at the top of the contemplative’s head, or small images situated at the center of interior spaces corresponding to a *chakra* (such as the heart region, the throat, or the center of the cranium).

Eventually the adept is given a *thangka* painting to visualize (fig. 1-5).



fig 1-5 Monk Painting Thangka in Tibet (1938)

Ideally, the contemplative enters the state of *samprajñata samādhi* (i.e., *samādhi* “with object”) holding the focus of awareness on an internal (mental) visualization of the a *thangka* painting.

Monks who paint *thangka* images are required to memorize the entire image, much as an opera singer is required to memorize an entire operatic score. After initiation and instruction, the student practices visualization as often as possible, ranging from one to several hours in length daily. The *thangka* are often teaching tools, depicting important

deities or lamas (monks) within the particular tradition of the contemplative. Once the visualization of the images has been mastered, the monk is encouraged to paint physical *thangka* of the image that can then be used in liturgical rites and by others. Highly advanced adepts are able to visualize extremely complex images. One of the most frequently visualized is the “Wheel of Life” (fig. 1-6) which represents the cycle of existence of an incarnated being.

Visualization of The Wheel of Life

The “Wheel of Life” is perhaps the oldest of all Buddhist teaching images and its visualization has been practiced by *thangka* painters, monks, and psychonauts for over two millenia. It is found prominently painted and displayed in the entrance way of the oldest Buddhist monasteries in Tibet.



Fig.1-6 Tibetan Thangka – The Wheel of Life.^{viii}

The image in totality is a complete symbolic representation of Tibetan Buddhist psychology, mapping incarnated beings in the unending cycle of existence. The root of this map can be seen in the symbolic forces represented by the three animals shown in the center of the image. These are referred to as “the three poisons” and from them the

whole cycle of existence is initialized, energized, and sustained. These three animals are a pig, a snake, and a bird, symbolically represented as follows:

- *Pig -> Ignorance* (pigs sleeps in the mud and eat whatever is put before their snouts)
- *Snake -> Anger* or aggression (snakes immediately becomes fully aroused at the slightest touch and ready to strike with venomous anger)
- *Bird -> Desire* or attachment (birds are known to be highly attached to their partners and always filled with a desire for procreation)

Under the influence of one or all of these three poisons, an incarnated consciousness moves from one to another of the six stages of life or realms of *samsāra*⁵ as shown separated by the spokes of a larger circular region in the diagram. The upper three regions indicate the three “higher realms” while the lower three regions depict the “lower realms” as follows:

- God-realm
- Demi-god realm
- Human realm
- Animal realm
- Hungry ghost realm
- Hell realm

⁵ *Samsāra* is rooted in the Sanskrit word *Samsr* (संस्र), translated as “to go round, revolve, pass through a succession of states, to go towards or obtain, moving in a circuit.”

None of these realms is truly desirable, even the God-realm, for they all continue to trap the incarnate soul within the revolving cycle of *Samsāra* from which the object of contemplative efforts is to escape this endless round of changing conditions and become one with the one true Self (in Jungian terms) or the Buddhist Void (which is also “One-without-an-other,” void of the little seemingly separate incarnated selves).

Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse, a Bhutanese Rinpoche⁶ recently explained the value the human realm in the map of the six realms:

If we need to judge the value of these six realms, the Buddhists would say the best realm is the human realm. Why is this the best realm? Because you have a choice. . . The gods don't have a choice. Why? They're too happy. When you are too happy you have no choice. You become arrogant. The hell realm: no choice, too painful. The human realm: not too happy and also not too painful. When you are not so happy and not in so much pain, what does that mean? A step closer to the normality of mind, remember? When you are really, really excited and in ecstasy, there is no normality of mind. And when you are totally in pain, you don't experience normality of mind either. So someone in the human realm has the best chance of acquiring that normality of mind. And this is why in Buddhist prayers you will always read: ideally may we get out of this place, but if we can't do it within this life, may we be reborn in the human realm, not the others.^{ix}

This map of the six realms has often been taken to be a description of six different states into which an incarnate being will be reborn, i.e. re-incarnation into one of the various states of being in a virtually endless spinning of the wheel of *samsāra*. However

⁶ Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche was born in Bhutan in 1961 and was recognized as the second reincarnation of the nineteenth-century master Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo.

the map has perhaps even more significance when it conveys to the psychonaut the understanding that these six states *are continually experienced*, or at least latently possible and often emerging to the forefront of experience in the daily life of a human individual each and every day. As Dzongsar has expressed it:

The word ‘born’ or ‘reborn’ means a lot. It does not necessarily mean that right now we are all in the human realm and we are not in the other five realms. Depending on what kind of *karma* we create, we will go to other realms. If the *karma* to be reborn or to experience the hell realm is the strongest, then you will change this form and then with another form you will experience a hellish kind of perception. According to Mahayana Buddhism the six realms are something that can happen during the course of a single day!^{ix}

Yet all of these six “realms” are experienced within space-time. The objective of Tibetan Vajrayana (and all Buddhist schools) is to move beyond the rat-race that is eternally experienced while one is spinning round and round on the revolving wheel of life. The goal (for the Buddhist monk as well as the psychonaut in general) is to master the dynamics of consciousness while enmeshed in *samsāra* and to acquire the ability to move beyond (or outside of) time and space, to arrive at Dudjom Lingpa’s fifth stage, “Joining” (or the direct crossing over or union with Bohm’s implicate order).

Tibetan Mantra Yoga: Aum Mani Padme Hum

The Sanskrit word *mantra* is itself a combination of the word *man*, “the thinking mind” and *tra*, “crossing” or “traversing.” These *mantras*, repetitions of short rhythmical phrases, have been found by sages in many cultures throughout the ages to be extremely effective as tools with which to bridge the mental activity of the brain, allowing awareness to pass beyond discursive thought into the vast oceans of “higher consciousness.” This process entails a shift of focus, a relocating of one’s center of gravity of awareness, inwardly, penetrating into ever smaller dimensions, below the verbal-activity levels into the nonverbal (pre-verbal) regions of consciousness. A scholarly definition of mantra can be found in Volume IV of the *History of Ancient Indian Religion* (1975):

A *mantra* may be conceived as a means of creating, conveying, concentrating thought, and of coming into touch or identifying oneself with the essence of the divinity which is present in the mantra.^{xi}

This description of *mantra* can be understood by other traditions as *prayer*. In Eastern Christianity, the widespread use of the “Jesus Prayer,” practiced by monks and hermits for centuries, falls under this definition, as does the Rosary (a series of “Our Father” and “Hail Mary” prayers) recited by Roman Catholics, or the Takbir, “Allahu Akbar” (“God is Great”) recited daily by Muslims. The importance of repetition of the mantra or prayer cannot be underestimated. With sufficient repetition, deep resonances build up in the vast web of reality that is everywhere connected.

Fig. 1-7 is by far the most famous *mantra* recited by Buddhists throughout Tibet and can be found carved on innumerable stones and printed on countless prayer flags

throughout the Himalayas. It is uttered continuously by all types of people from monks to farm workers, and it sums up (and is a reminder of) a primary map in Tibetan Vajrayana.



Fig. 1-7 Tibetan Mantra – “Om Mani Padme Hum”

Mantra are much more than words, even sacred words, though all prayer can be mantra. Even single words or sounds (*bija* mantras), repeated over and over, will function as *mantra* when practiced with a continuous effort to focus awareness. The repetition, does *not* have to be audible, and is often a silent repetition heard only in the head or localized in one of the *chakra* areas of the human body. The audible resonance is consciousness itself, and internal repetition leads to contact with the trans-temporal source of the vibrations located outside of space-time and within the frequency domain of consciousness, Bohm’s implicate order. The repetition *mantra* can be viewed as an effective gateway to supersensible modes of consciousness associated with Patañjali’s *samādhi* or Dudjom Lingpa’s *śamatha*.

Here the scientist and philosopher I.K. Taimni (who obtained his Ph.D. in Chemistry from London University in 1928 and later became President of the Theosophical Society in Adyar) describes his own understanding of *mantra*, based upon his own lifetime experience of regular *mantra* practice:

The aim of all *mantra*, in short, is to purify and harmonize the vehicles of the seeker so that they become increasingly sensitive to the subtler layers of his own spiritual consciousness. As he comes into contact with these he becomes increasingly aware of that Reality of which his own consciousness is a partial expression.^{xii}

Rephrasing this statement in psychophysical terms we would say that the aim of mantra is to tune into, or to resonate with, a particular bandwidth of energy frequencies, a spectrum of energy accessible to our own consciousness that can be contacted through mantric vibration resonating in a bandwidth of atemporal conscious energy.

Within this bandwidth or region of atemporal consciousness (which cannot even really be called a region as it is both non-temporal and non-spatial, outside of time and space), in what is called the frequency domain in the EMF field theory of consciousness, can be found all of the vibrations that have ever been generated, interpenetrating in all of their complexities. This is called, in many Indian schools of thought, the *Ākāśa*, or *Alaya-vijñana*, the “storehouse of all consciousness;” and it is this domain that is “touched” by the contemplative yogi during sessions reaching *asamprajñata samādhi*, when the various separate cognitive systems of thought and perception have been attenuated and the deepest silence has been entered. It may also be seen as a means of tuning in to Teilhard de Chardin’s *noosphere* (described in Chapter 3).

It is ironic that in order to reach the state Patañjali calls *asamprajñata samādhi* and to tune in to the *akashic records* one must have stopped one's memory formation activity. A contemporary computer analogy would be to put one's computer system into "sleep mode." One must learn to be able to suspend the brain's computational activity, and this includes suspension of both short term and long term memory creation. One of the best tools to accomplish this is the practice of *mantra* repetition (which of course could range from a single 'meaningless' syllable to a Christian or Muslim prayer). The key here is the practice repeating the syllable, phrase, *mantra*, or prayer; through repetition the brain-mind will maintain a connection, even if tenuous at times, with something beyond the normal bounds of cognitive thinking in words and memories.

At some point in time during *mantric* repetition, consciousness may be able to detach from the normal activities of the brain and the flow of time. The normal functions of the brain-mind has now been "silenced," attenuated, and deactivated. Hence the difficulty (once the computational brain has left sleep mode and resumes "thinking") of communicating the "experience" or of describing this state, and thus the resulting myriad metaphors and symbols throughout cultures and religions serving as substitutes for the authentic experience.

Tibetan Chakra Meditation

Tatric technology has long included the practice of focusing consciousness upon loci within the human physiology which are particularly sensitive. These physiological centers begin to resonate when the focus of consciousness can be maintained within the region for an extended period of time. These locations are designated by the Sanskrit term

chakra. The contemplative sage M.P. Pandit, a follower of Sri Aurobindo and resident of Pondicherry, South India, has written extensively on chakras:

There are in the being of man certain nodii which are so to say centres connecting him with other universal planes of existence; and when properly tapped they open up in one's being their respective planes and the powers that are characteristic of the principles governing those planes. Within the Indian Yogic systm, these are called "chakras" or "Centers."^{xiii}

A more Western, medical description of these areas was presented in 1926, before the Bombay Medical Union, by Dr. V.G. Rele, who read a paper for those interested in "the science of Yoga," (discussed earlier iin Chapter 3) Rele presented a theoretical psychophysical explanation for some of the experiential changes in consciousness described by Yogis as a result of Tantric practices, and worked to relate nerve plexi to inner *chakra* centers (fig. 1-8).

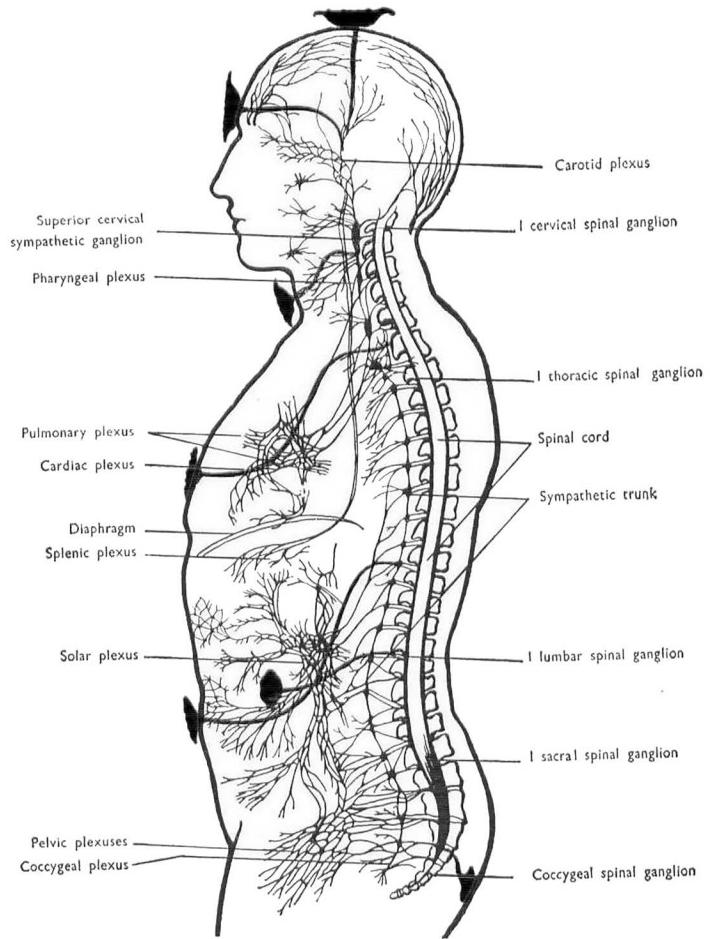


Fig. 1-8 Diagram of human chakra center relative to nerve plexi.

Every Tantric tradition uses *chakra* diagrams to guide practitioners. An Indian Tantric diagram from the 19th century is shown in fig. 1-9.

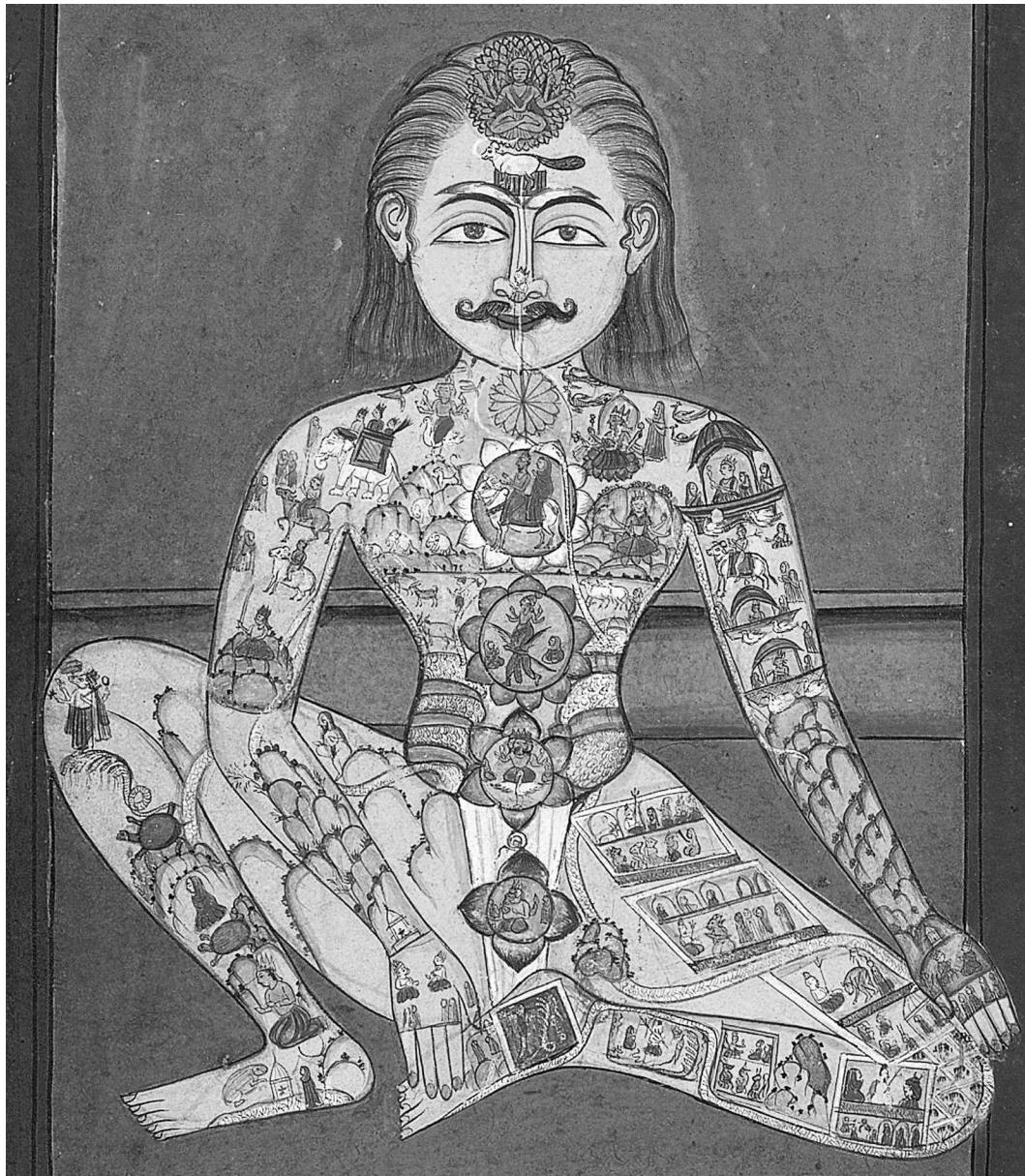


Fig.1-9 Indian diagram of chakras and energy channels.^{xiv}

The chakra is experienced as a psychophysical matrix with a definite spatial location within the human body. Diagrams of chakras are used as mnemonic tools to assist the practitioner recall the various locations within which to focus consciousness during periods of contemplative practice. The *ajña-chakra*, for example, can be seen in every diagram, located behind the forehead in the cranium.

This *chakra* is the naso-ciliary extension of the cavernous plexus of the sympathetic through the ophthalmic division of the fifth cranial nerve, ending in the ciliary muscles of the iris and at the root of the nose, through the supra-orbital foramen. It has two petals or branches and is situated between the eye-brows. It is the spot which is contemplated while undergoing the process of *prāṇāyāma*.⁷

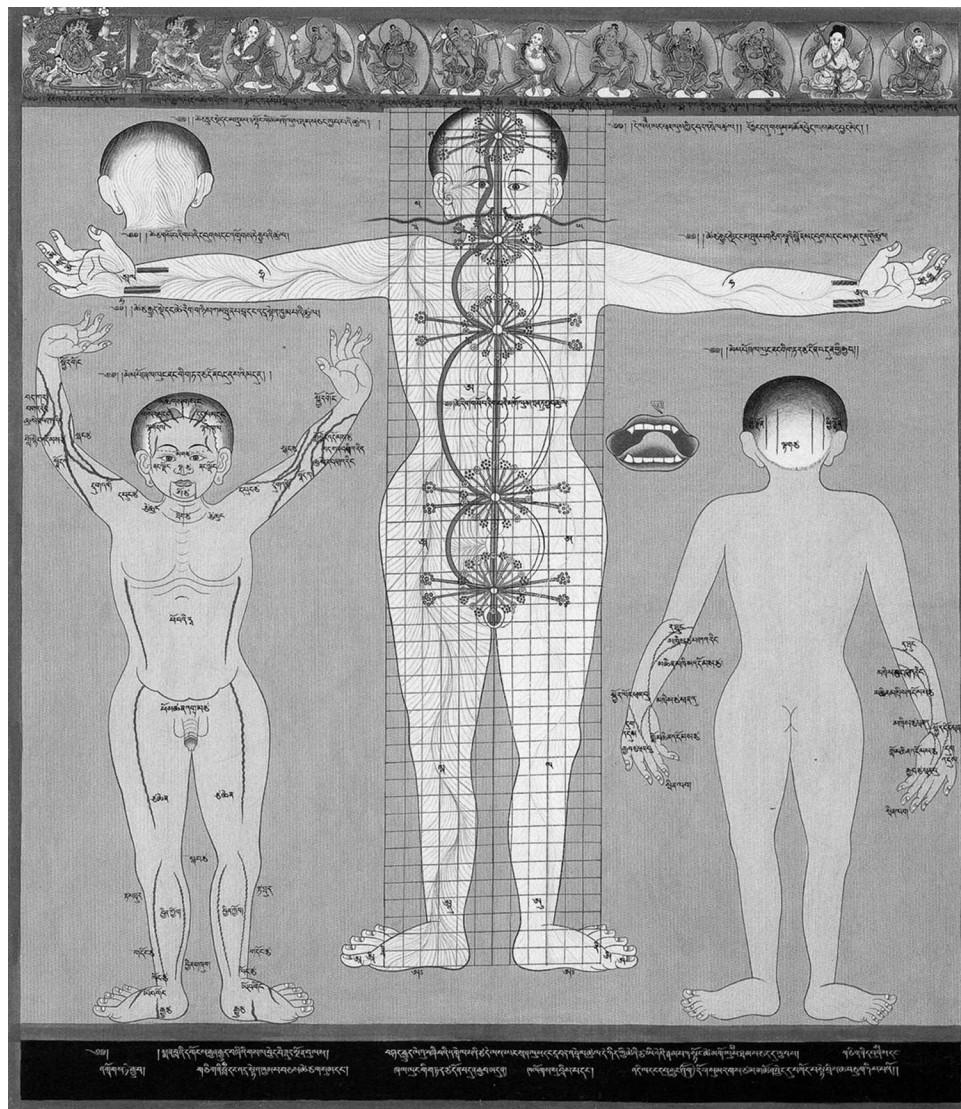


Fig 1-10 Tibetan chakras diagram

Nada Yoga Meditation

Nada is the Sanskrit word for “sound,” and *nada yoga* means meditating on sound. This technique is an ancient one, described in the *Mahāsakuludāyi Sutra* where the Buddha teaches the technique of “transcendental hearing” now referred to as *Nada Yoga*. It is widely practiced by practitioners of Tibetan Vajrayana, and one of the most succinct descriptions of the technique was recently published by Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche, born in 1956 in Sikkim, a *tulkus*⁸ of the Nyingma lineage:

To detect the *nada* sound, turn your attention toward your hearing. If you listen carefully to the sounds around you, you’re likely to hear a continuous, high-pitched inner sound like white noise in the background. It is a sound that is beginningless and endless. There’s no need to theorize about this inner vibration in an effort to figure out exactly what it might be. Just turn your attention and focus upon it. If you are able to hear this inner sound, you can use the simple act of listening to it as a powerful form of meditation practice, in the same way one uses the breath as an object of awareness. Just bring your attention to focus upon the inner sound and allow it to fill the whole sphere of your awareness.^{xv}

My Own Experience of the “Inner Sounds”

Shortly after graduating in Texas with an electrical engineering degree I moved to New York and began working as an airport lighting designer in the World Trade Center, while living in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. At that time I spent many of my evenings and weekends attending lectures on consciousness, Indian and Tibetan mysticism, and *yoga*. I also began practicing *hatha yoga* daily under the guidance of

⁸ In Tibet, a *tulku* is regarded as a reincarnated custodian of a specific lineage of teachings. All of the Dalai Lamas have been *tulkus*.

Swami Satchidananda and his followers, who had purchased a large building in the West Village to teach what they called *Integral Yoga*, though it seemed to focus primarily on *hatha yoga* training. Being young and highly motivated, I soon was able to hold numerous poses. One late evening I was in the inner (windowless) room of my 5th floor walkup on East 6th street. I had gone through my usual set of yoga exercises and was at the end, trying to maintain a shoulder stand posture (*sarvāṅgāsana*) for 10 minutes. Part of the exercise was to move into the pose, then to become as quiet as possible, practicing internal silence. This required making an effort to attenuate every thoughts that might arise, to detach from and not follow memories as they began to form, nor to allow any inner dialogue to resume streaming. The goal was to open up the bandwidth of awareness and to remain receptive, just listening. Suddenly, out of the silence, I heard a singular loud, high pitched tone which seemed to be located somewhere within my cranium. I noticed that as I focused my awareness on the sound it seemed to coalesce into a point while substantially increasing in volume! I quickly feared I might be experiencing a brain aneurism in progress. But as I soon discovered that by maintaining my focus, I was able to coax the sound into growing louder and more distinct, my fears were transformed into awe at this audible tone coming from within. Even more strange was that accompanying the sound sensation was a sensation of “touch” detectible within this tiny region located somewhere within the upper right-hand quadrant of my brain.

Then things became even more strange. After noticing the initial “bright” sound, additional “points” of sound of distinctly different pitch began to rise into awareness *in other locations in my cranium*. I gently lowered myself from my shoulder-stand position and, ending my hatha yoga for the night, lay down under a blanket in the dark. For many hours that night I could not sleep, totally fascinated in focusing upon and listening to the

sounds that would variously increase in volume according to the degree that I would be able to direct my attention toward them. I noticed, however, that as soon as I would begin consciously thinking “about them” or “thinking in words,” letting my attention begin to stray, they would subside and contact would be lost. I quickly learned that by gently dropping my train of thought which seemed so insistent on thinking, classifying, etc., I was able once more enter the silence and the tiny sounds would suddenly peek out of the silence once more, and increase in volume in what was clearly a feedback loop, a sort of reverberation responding to my search. The tones were quite pure, high pitched, and I suppose most people would classify them as a “ringing in the ears.” Several months later I discovered the term “tinnitus,” which was defined by medical science as any perceived sound not brought in by the ear canal. Since perception of these sounds seemed to bother people, doctors decided that it must be an disease of the hearing system with an unknown (yet to be determined) source.

Nevertheless, by now being quite serious in my efforts to explore the phenomenon of “consciousness” by any means possible, catalyzed by the unknown dimensions I had experienced on LSD in California two years earlier, I became completely fascinated by the appearance of the strange sounds that had arisen out of the silence. I found that by trying to ignore a particularly dominant bright sound and trying to focus on a fainter, more obscure sound (“further away from” or “behind” the first) the second sound would immediately grow louder in volume and become easier to focus upon using this inner focal-sense mechanism. Here was direct cause and effect, albeit in an internal domain of consciousness among some kind of living experiential fields of energy dynamics. All that night I lay awake in the dark, moving from sound to sound within my head, as each would rise and fall, almost as if each had an independent volition of its own. I experienced strong

emotional oscillations between exaltation verging on disbelief, and terror that I might be damaging my neuronal centers, perhaps even encouraging (or experiencing) a brain damaging hemorrhage.

As an electrical engineer, I had often listened to various single sinusoidal tones generated by equipment in laboratory sessions, yet this was not a single tone but a confluence of tones faintly making up a background of the perceived, sensed audio range, like those aforementioned “peepers” in the forest at night at Hamilton’s pool. It was at specific points in space within my cranium, that from time to time a tone would arise with exponential sharpness high above the background level, to become a bright point, like a beacon, upon which, if I were able to sustain focus for a few moments, would become markedly louder with an accompanying intense tactile sensation.

During the course of what seemed a very long night my body grew hot and sweated profusely, soaking the sheets in what I assumed might be a fever caused by whatever was happening in my brain. I went through what seemed to be a long period of deep fear, suspecting that I had somehow damaged my nervous system. Yet, since that first night listening to the inner sounds, I have never experienced a headache or discomfort of any kind within my cranium.

Some time in the early morning hours I fell asleep. When I awoke it was with great relief to find that my mind seemed to be back to normal, having returned to its familiar mode of verbalized thoughts, chatting away merrily once more. However I now lived with these new memories and realization that something singularly strange had occurred, something I had never been prepared for and which I had never previously encountered in books nor in life’s experiences.

I continued to practice *hatha yoga* but spent increasingly long periods in silent meditation, finding that, now, I was able to fairly easily contact these resonant inner sounds. I began the practice of focusing upon them while falling asleep, and found that when I would begin to awaken from a dream in the middle of the night, I was able to quickly re-enter the dream world by following these mysterious bright inner sounds.

My training in physics and electrical engineering led me to believe that these internal sounds were sine waves, not some sort of random noise. The tones also appeared to manifest in narrow spectrums centered about fundamental frequencies. For a time, I conjectured that they might be mechanical resonances within the physical structures of my inner ear. At the time I worked as an engineer for the Port Authority on the 64th floor of the World Trade Center, and began to experience, with great surprise, one of the high pitched sounds flare up in my cranium whenever I approached certain electronic equipment, computer screens, or even certain vending machines. At such moments I found myself internally verbalizing, with some humor “incoming,” a phrase widely heard in the media at that time, from the front lines in Vietnam.

Over the next few weeks I noticed that, during my meditation sessions, if I concentrated awareness within different physical/spatial locations within my body, such as the heart or the throat, perceptually different sounds would arise in different locations and patterns, though the sounds were most clear and pronounced in the central region of my brain.

I soon concluded that the source of these perceived inner sounds must be of an electromagnetic nature, possibly the vibrations of a neuronal plexus within my nervous system resonating with electromagnetic modulations of our Earth’s electromagnetic

energy fields, or in the case of vending machines, the harmonic frequencies of some internal electrical radiation emanating from their circuitry, transformers, etc.

In bookstores I began to search for books on the anatomical structures of the brain and the central nervous system. This was the age before the internet, but fortunately I was living in New York City, and had access not only to the New York Public Library, but to many bookstores with extensive medical sections. I was soon able to obtain excellent material with technical illustrations and x-ray photographs of internal physiological structures. I used these to visualize, with as much detail as possible, those internal areas, usually corresponding with the Indian chakra system, while meditating in the dark.

Over several years this process, concentrating and visualizing within areas of my body and focusing on the sound tones as they would arise, became a main source of meditative practice for me, and the inner sounds tones grew ever more richly complex and often markedly louder in volume, and began to produce distinct tactile sensations of flowing nature, unlike the sensations felt in the external senses of touch, vision, taste, and hearing.

ⁱ Bagchi, “Evolution of the Tantras,” 219.

ⁱⁱ Image of Tibetan ritual bell and vajra (British Museum). Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 and retrieved from Wikimedia Commons at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ghanta_et_Vajra_\(British_Museum\)_\(_8697431158\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ghanta_et_Vajra_(British_Museum)_(_8697431158).jpg).

ⁱⁱⁱ Wallace, *Fathoming the Mind: Inquiry and Insight in Düdjom Lingpa’s Vajra Essence*, 1.

^{iv} Düdjom Lingpa, *Heart of the Great Perfection*, 145.

^v Wallace, *Fathoming the Mind*, 221.

^{vi} Wallace, *Fathoming the Mind: Inquiry and Insight in Düdjom Lingpa’s Vajra Essence*, 8-9.

^{vii} Düdjom Lingpa, *Heart of The Great Perfection*, 18.

^{viii} This 19th century Tibetan *thangka* of the Wheel of Life is in the public domain as it was published prior to 1925; retrieved from
https://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=File:SRT34wheel_of_life.jpg

^{ix} Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche, “The Wheel of Life,” 3.

^x Ibid., 2.

^{xi} Gonda, *History of Ancient Indian Religion*, 259.

^{xii} I.K. Taimni, *Gayatri*, 24.

^{xiii} M.P. Pandit, *Lights on the Tantra*. (Madras: Ganesh & Co, 1957), 15.

^{xiv} Image of Tibetan chakras licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 and retrieved from Wikimedia Commons at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chakras_and_energy_channels_2_(3749594497).jpg.

^{xv} Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche, *Mind Beyond Death*, 190.